

THE TRAGEDY OF ROGER CRAIG

BY PETER KROSS

Of the many witnesses in Dealy Plaza on the afternoon of November 22, 1963, one man in particular saw an event take place that would seriously cast doubt on the Warren Commission's conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald killed President John Kennedy.

But the F.B.I. and the panel appointed by President Johnson to probe JFK's death refused to believe the incident; it just didn't fit into their preconceived scenario.

For what deputy sheriff Roger Craig, a decorated and honest cop saw was Lee Harvey Oswald get into a Nash Rambler station wagon after he allegedly shot President Kennedy and drive away with another man at the wheel.

If Roger Craig was right, then Oswald (or someone who looked just like him) had help in the murder of the president and conspiracy could be proved.

But Craig also told another startling bit of news concerning more than one man with a rifle in the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository in the minutes before the assassination took place.

Again, when he told the Warren Commission of his findings, his reports were brushed aside.

Roger Craig was born in Wisconsin, grew up in Minnesota and ran away from home at age 12. Unhappy with his life he enlisted in the army before his 18th birthday. When the military discovered that he was under age, Craig was discharged but later legally enlisted.

While in the army he earned his high school equivalency diploma, served in Japan and was honorably discharged two years later.

Returning to the United States, and with no permanent home, Craig

worked in the West and Southwest on various ranches. He found menial jobs as a dishwasher and a cook but longed to better himself. His big break came on October 9, 1959, when he entered the Dallas County Sheriff office.

In the years Craig worked as a lawman he was considered bright and hard working. In 1960, Craig was honored as the Man of the Year for his capture of a wanted criminal.

For the 27 year old Craig, his life seemed to take on a pattern of work and family. Things were going well. He had a secure job doing what he liked best.

Then came November 22, 1963.

Fifteen minutes before the president's motorcade approached the corner of Elm and Houston Streets, Craig was standing near the Sheriff's office at 505 Main Street. He and his fellow officers were told not to take part in the security preparations for President Kennedy's motorcade through Dallas.

Craig thought this was unusual and later reported that his fellow policemen, no friends of JFK, complained that by not providing protection to the president, they were forced to acknowledge his presence.

At 12:30 C.S.T., as Roger Craig saw President Kennedy's limousine come by, he heard three shots ring out. He noticed the confusion in Dealy Plaza, looked on in horror as the president's car, with a secret service agent spread-eagled on top, race for Parkland Hospital.

Immediately upon hearing the shots, Craig and officer Buddy Walthers headed up Houston Street to the railroad yards behind the grassy knoll. After seeing nothing unusual they both left the scene.

It was then that Roger Craig encountered the first of many odd events. He stopped a woman who was trying to leave the locked parking lot behind the picket fence near the railroad yards. Craig released the strange woman into the custody of deputy sheriff C.L. Lewis who let

her go.

A few minutes later, Craig was told by officer Walthers that a bullet fragment had struck a curb on the south side of Elm Street. (the ricocheting bullet hit passerby James Teague).

He and officer Lewis tried to locate where the shot impacted. It was at this point that Craig made his startling discovery. He told the Warren Commission.

"I heard a shrill whistle and I turned around and saw a white male running down the hill from the direction of the Texas School Book Depository Building, and I saw what I think was a light colored Rambler station wagon with a luggage rack on top pull over to the curb and this subject who came running down the hill get into the car."

That man, according to Craig, was Lee Harvey Oswald.

At that point, Craig tried to intercept the man before the car got away but the traffic was so heavy it disappeared before he could get there. Craig said the man he saw entering the car was "a white male in his twenties, 140 to 150, blue trousers and a light tan shirt." He also said that he thought the driver had dark skin and was possibly a Negro.

In an interesting twist, Craig stated that he observed the police questioning a Latin looking man near the Texas School Book Depository. Since he couldn't speak English, the man was released.

This is the same man Craig saw as the driver of the station wagon.

Another puzzling development is the testimony of Mr. and Mrs. Arnold Rowland who were in Dealy Plaza 25 minutes before the assassination. The Rowlands told Craig that prior to the first shot they saw two men in the sixth floor of the T.S.B.D. One man was white and the other Black.

Shortly after the president was killed, Craig and other officers entered the T.S.B.D. to search for the killer. On the sixth floor, Craig and other officers located the rifle, along

with three spent shells lined up neatly in a row. Lt. Day of the identification bureau photographed the rifle with Roger Craig in attendance. Craig swore that on the rifle was printed 7.65 MAUSER, not the Mannlicher-Carcano Oswald is supposed to have used.

The events of what Roger Craig saw that day would now take another dramatic twist. About 5:30 PM., Craig went to Captain Will Fritz's office at Dallas police headquarters and saw a suspect being questioned. When Fritz asked Craig if this was the man he saw entering the Nash Rambler, Craig said yes.

That man was Lee Harvey Oswald.

Fritz tried to calm Oswald by telling him they (the police) were trying to determine if he (Oswald) left the scene. Oswald replied, "I told you people I did." And in a claim that has been disputed, Oswald is to have said, "Everybody will know who I am now."

In the days and months after the assassination, Captain Fritz denied that he had seen Roger Craig at police headquarters. But Craig's presence is verified by a photo published by Police Chief Jesse Curry in his book *JFK Assassination File* which shows Craig there.

There has been speculation that the man Craig saw get into the Nash Rambler may have been an Oswald double. Numerous sightings of a man impersonating Oswald in the weeks prior to the assassination are documented.

For example, a man claiming to be Oswald fired his gun at another shooter's target at a Dallas rifle range.

Roger Craig testified before the Warren Commission on April 1, 1964. Questioned by David Belin, Craig told the members what he'd seen and heard on the day the president was killed.

In the end, the commission failed to take Craig's statements seriously. Later, Craig would lament after the Warren report was published, Counsel Belin made fourteen changes to his testimony which he (Craig) had not approved

of.

Craig continued to give interviews in the years after the assassination. Apparently, his openness rankled the Dallas police and Craig was fired on July 4, 1967 by Sheriff Decker, citing his poor performance.

Craig's personal life now went from bad to worse. He left Dallas for New Orleans where he worked for D.A. Jim Garrison who was conducting his own investigation of the president's death.

Back in Dallas, his life became a horror. He was shot at in a parking lot, his car exploded with him in it and in 1974 he was again shot by a stranger as he opened the door to his house.

Craig worked at menial jobs as guard in a jewelry store and for a detective agency.

The final end for Roger Craig came on May 15, 1975 when he was found dead in his father's house in Dallas with a suicide note by his side.

When asked about his feelings concerning the president's death, Roger Craig said, "you can't have two corroborating witnesses."

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